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ABSTRACT

A review of recent research on school counseling reveals that individual and group counseling, career counseling, and consultation with parents and teachers are the most important functions for school counselors as rated by counselors, teachers, administrators, parents, and students, whereas ineffective counseling is linked with too much time on administrative and clerical duties and too few counselors to serve too many students. Current trends in the preparation of school counselors include (1) 2-year, full-time master's degree in school counseling with a supervised internship in the schools for one full academic term; (2) separate specialty courses for elementary, middle, and secondary school counselors; and (3) increased emphasis on group guidance, group counseling, and preventive interventions, particularly at the elementary level. Several states now mandate elementary school counselors and some states mandate that most of a counselor's time be spent in direct service to students. Twenty-two references are included. (Author/TE)

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Research on the Roles, Preparation, and Effectiveness of School Counselors

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Abstract

A review of recent research on school counseling reveals that individual and group counseling, career counseling, and consultation with parents and teachers are the most important functions for school counselors as rated by counselors, teachers and administrators, parents, and students. School counselor effectiveness is linked with the successful performance of these activities. School counselor ineffectiveness is linked with inordinate amounts of time performing administrative and clerical duties and too few counselors to serve too many students.

Current trends in the preparation for school counselors include: a) two-year, full-time master's degree in school counseling with supervised internship in the schools for one full academic term; b) separate, specialty courses for elementary, middle, and secondary school counselors; c) increased emphasis on group guidance, group counseling and preventive interventions, particularly on the elementary level.

Current trends in school counselor certification are to require a two-year master's degree and accept supervised internship in the school as an alternative to teacher certification. Several states now mandate elementary school counselors and some states mandate that most of a school counselor's time be spent in direct services to students.

What School Counselors Do

Secondary School Counselors

Secondary school counselors in Muncie, Indiana when asked to rank their counselor functions in order of actual time spent, listed their first ten functions as: individual personal counseling, scheduling, academic counseling, testing, parent conferences, record keeping, special education responsibilities, teacher or administrator consultation, career and life planning, and classroom guidance activities (Hutchinson, Barrick, & Groves, 1986). Counselors in secondary schools continue to spend much of their time scheduling. A 20% random sample of secondary school counselors in Minnesota revealed that counselors engage in scheduling more than in any other single activity (Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, & Williams, 1989).

Individual and group counseling, career and life planning, and consulting are seen by secondary school counselors as their most important functions (Hutchinson, Barrick, & Groves, 1986). Miller (1988) surveyed counselors at schools identified as excellent by the U.S. Department of Education and found that secondary school counselors ranked counseling, consulting, and career assistance as their most important functions. In addition, secondary school counselors spend significant amounts of time in academic counseling, scheduling, testing, and parent conferences (Hutchinson, Barrick, & Groves, 1986).

Elementary and Middle School Counselors

Elementary and middle school counselors in Miller's (1988) survey of excellent schools ranked individual and group counseling,

consultation with parents and teachers, and coordination as their most important activities. In spite of this, there is evidence that counselors at the elementary and middle school levels are bogged down with clerical and administrative activities. "It seems that counselors are more involved than they believe they should be in disseminating and maintaining educational, occupational, personal, and social information; coordinating testing; coordinating placement of exceptional students; and maintaining educational records" (Kameen, Robinson, & Rotter, 1985, p. 100). Similar conclusions were drawn from a sample of elementary school counselors in Oregon who reported spending significant amounts of time in meetings, testing, and non-guidance activities including lunch room duty, bus duty, classroom substitution, and administrative duties (Wilgus & Shelley, 1988). It should be noted that the Oregon counselors reported spending more time in counseling than in any other function.

What Others Expect of School Counselors

Teachers and Administrators

Principals in elementary and junior high schools ranked the following counselor functions as most important: individual counseling, student assessment, teacher consultant, evaluation of guidance, and parent consultant (Bonebrake & Borgers, 1984). This is consistent with the perceptions of teachers surveyed by Wilgus and Shelley (1988) who expected secondary school counselors to provide individual and group counseling, parent and staff consultation. A nationwide survey of teachers' views of guidance services in middle

schools revealed support for counselor involvement in personal and vocational guidance, but 41.7% of the teachers indicated that counselors handled disciplinary problems (Cole, Miller, Splittberger, & Allen, 1980).

Students and Parents

One way to assess what school counselors should be doing is by asking their consumers, the students. A survey of 250 first-year college students revealed that 89% believed they needed career counseling in high school, and 60% reported needing personal counseling, however a majority of the students reported having difficulties seeing their high school counselor (Hutchinson & Bottorff, 1986).

Parents believe school counselors should assist students in course selection, provide career counseling and job placement, and inform parents of problems encountered by their children (Helms & Ibrahim, 1985; Ibrahim, Helms, & Thompson, 1983). Students, teachers, principals, and parents all believe that school counselors have too many administrative duties to be effective in helping children (Remley, & Albright, 1988).

Summary

It would appear that school counselors at both the secondary and elementary levels are engaged in individual and group counseling, however, there are many other school-related functions which they are expected to perform, and which they, themselves, report performing on a regular basis. These other responsibilities appear to interfere with

school counselors' availability to the specialty service they have been trained to provide--counseling. The problem appears to be more pronounced at the high school level where many school counselors are burdened with administrative and clerical tasks.

Counselors, administrators, teachers, parents, and students seem to agree that school counselors should be providing counseling services. The specific services most often mentioned by all of these groups are individual counseling, group counseling, parent and teacher consultation. There is considerable agreement that these counseling and consultation services should be aimed at personal/social adjustment, educational and academic concerns, career awareness, and life and career planning.

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of School Counselors

Evaluating the effectiveness of school counselors is more difficult than evaluating the effectiveness of classroom teachers. Counseling involves confidential relationships with students and parents. It is not always possible to sit in on counseling sessions for evaluation observations. Many of the records of counseling activities are confidential and cannot be shared without the consent of the student or parent. Nevertheless, there has been considerable research into the effectiveness of school counselors. This review includes only a sample of the available research concentrating on studies with controlled research designs and large sample sizes.

Effects of Individual and Group Counseling

During the 1985-86 school year the Clinical and Guidance Program

provided counseling services to 10,536 K-12 students enrolled in Chapter I remedial programs in 201 schools in New York City. Students receiving counseling for social and emotional problems showed statistically significant gains in norm-referenced and criterion-referenced achievement tests, and showed significantly reduced behavioral problems as measured by the Behavior Checklist (Guerrero, et al., 1987).

One of the most comprehensive studies to date on the effects of counseling was conducted by Smith, Glass and Miller (1980). They reviewed over 475 controlled evaluations of counseling in all settings which met strict scientific criteria using a procedure called meta-analysis. They found an effect size of .85, which means that on average, a person receiving counseling is better off than 80% of untreated persons. Prout and DeMartino (1986) conducted a similar review of 33 controlled evaluations of individual and group counseling in the schools. They also concluded that counseling was effective. They further concluded that group counseling was slightly more effective than individual counseling in a school setting. One of the problems noted with individual counseling in the schools was the short-term nature of the intervention. However, another meta-analysis on 2,431 counseling clients revealed that 50% of clients' measurable improvement occurs by the eighth counseling session (Garfield & Bergin, 1986).

Effectiveness of School Counselors as Consultants

Bundy and Poppen (1986) reviewed 13 evaluation research studies on

the effectiveness of school counselors' consultations with teachers. In 10 out of 13 studies measures of effectiveness were statistically significant. They reviewed 8 studies of the effectiveness of school counselors' consultations with parents and in all 8 studies measures of effectiveness were statistically significant.

Effectiveness of Elementary School Counselors

A survey of 173 parents, 293 teachers, and 430 students in Texas revealed that elementary school counselors had a positive impact on self-acceptance, school attitudes, following rules, and family relations (Crabbs, 1984). An elementary school counselor in Virginia led group counseling sessions and teacher consultations aimed at improving the school climate and improving the behavior of 90 fourth and fifth graders. Results indicated significant reductions in behavior problems as rated by the teachers on the Behavior Problem Checklist (Cobb & Richards, 1983). An evaluation of elementary school counselors in Tennessee included questionnaires, site visits, and phone calls to all school districts in the state. The results showed that elementary school counselors were strongly supported by parents and school personnel, that counselor effectiveness decreased when the counselor was assigned to more than one school or to more than 500 students, and that counselors were effective in changing student behaviors (Boser et al., 1985).

Summary

There is ample evidence that when school counselors are present in schools with workloads which allow them to provide direct counseling

and consultation services, students' academic and social performance improves. Of particular note is the fact that individual and group counseling aimed at social and emotional adjustment significantly improves academic achievement while reducing behavior problems.

Current Trends in the Preparation and Certification of School Counselors

In the 1960s nearly all states recruited school counselors from the teaching ranks and certified them after they took 15-30 semester hours of graduate coursework. Since then the trend has been for increasing the master's level coursework and requiring an internship in the schools.

A recent survey (Ritchie, 1990) reveals that at least 48 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia require a master's degree for certification as a school counselor. There is a clear trend for requiring more coursework for the master's degree with the average now topping 40 semester hours (Hollis & Wantz, 1986). A survey by Paisley and Hubbard (1989) found that 26 states either no longer require teacher certification or accept an internship in lieu of teacher certification for school counselor certification.

The American School Counselors Association (ASCA) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) have put forth a proposal for minimum standards for school counselor preparation which include:

1. Support for two-year, graduate level programs of preparation for school counselors, including one full term of supervised

internship in a school setting.

2. The use of the CACREP Standards as minimum requirements for certification of school counselors in all states in the United States, and, the full term of supervised internship as a viable option for any requirement for teaching experience.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is a COPA-recognized, national accrediting body which sets standards for the preparation of counselors. The CACREP Standards for the preparation of school counselors include a master's degree of at least 48 semester hours or 72 quarter hours, supervised practicum of at least 100 clock hours including a minimum of 40 clock hours of direct service work, supervised internship in a school setting of at least 600 clock hours including a minimum of 240 hours of direct service work. Direct service work is defined as face-to-face interaction with clients which includes the application of counseling, consultation, or human development skills (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 1988).

Summary

There has been a clear trend toward requiring a two-year master's degree in counseling including an internship in the schools for school counselor certification. There has been a move toward accepting the internship as an alternative to teaching experience for certification as a school counselor. In addition, several states have mandated elementary school counselors.

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